

## Achieving the Dream

Achieving the Dream, Inc. is a national nonprofit that is dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree. Evidence-based, student-centered, and built on the values of equity and excellence, Achieving the Dream is closing achievement gaps and accelerating student success nationwide by: 1) improving results at institutions, 2) influencing public policy, 3) generating knowledge, and 4) engaging the public. Conceived as an initiative in 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven founding partner organizations, today, Achieving the Dream is the largest non-governmental reform movement for student success in higher education history. With 160 community colleges and institutions, more than 100 coaches and advisors, and 16 state policy teams—working throughout 30 states and the District of Columbia—Achieving the Dream helps 3.5 million community college students have a better chance of realizing greater economic opportunity and achieving their dreams.



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## Delayed Enrollment: Is It a Risk?

Research has found that, generally, students who delay enrollment in postsecondary education after high school graduation are at higher risk for not completing credentials when compared with students enrolling immediately after high school.<sup>1</sup> Students delaying enrollment are, obviously, older and may have different reasons for enrolling and different educational goals. Students who delay enrollment often have work experience and may come to their education with different skills than do students directly out of high school. Others who delay enrollment may have done so to start families. Regardless of their reasons, once enrolled, their challenges in persisting or completing differ from those of students enrolling immediately after high school.

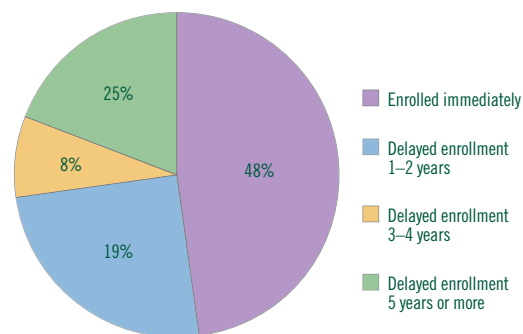
Knowing the characteristics of students enrolling immediately after high school graduation compared with those who delay enrollment, along with the variations in their respective outcomes, can help colleges identify the differences between the two populations and tailor their programs to increase student success.

This issue of *Data Notes* examines characteristics and three-year outcome<sup>2</sup> differences between students who enroll in Achieving the Dream colleges immediately after high school and those who delay their enrollments. Recent high school graduates were identified based on the student's reported high school graduation year and the year the student first enrolled in the Achieving the Dream college.<sup>3</sup> Comparisons were conducted between students who enrolled during the fall immediately following high school graduation, those who delayed enrollment one to two years, three to four years, and five or more years after graduating.<sup>4</sup> Student characteristics examined include: attendance status, developmental education needs, type of major, gender, race/ethnicity, and Pell grant receipt.

## Timing of College Enrollment and Outcomes

The amount of time between high school graduation and college enrollment is an important

**Figure 1.** Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students by enrollment timing



Note: The following student cohorts were included in this analysis: Round 1, 2002, 2003; Round 2, 2003, 2004; Round 3, 2004, 2005; Round 4, 2005, 2006; Round 5, 2006, 2007; Round 6, 2007. Only students with valid high school graduation data were included; 76 percent of student records carry valid high school graduation year data and were included in this analysis.

indicator of later student success outcomes. Nearly half, 48 percent of students enrolling in Achieving the Dream colleges enrolled in the fall term immediately following high school graduation (Figure 1). About one-fifth, 19 percent, enrolled within one to two years, and one

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quarter of students waited five or more years to enroll. The remaining 8 percent enrolled within three to four years of graduating from high school.

Students who enrolled immediately after high school graduation were more likely to persist than were students who delayed their enrollment,

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<sup>1</sup> Horn, L., Cataldi, E.F., & Sikora, A. (2005). *Waiting to attend college: Undergraduates who delay their postsecondary enrollment* (NCES 2005–152). U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2005152>.

<sup>2</sup> Completion, transfer and persistence within three years is referred to herein as “three-year outcomes.”

<sup>3</sup> Achieving the Dream colleges reported high school graduation year for 76 percent of students included in this analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Note: Students who delayed enrollment at the Achieving the Dream college may have enrolled in a different institution between high school graduation and the first Achieving the Dream college enrollment.

## What Is a Cohort?

A cohort is a group of people studied during a period of time. The individuals in the group have at least one statistical factor—such as when they started college—in common.

The Achieving the Dream 2002 student cohort, for example, is the group of credential-seeking students that attended Achieving the Dream institutions for the first time in fall 2002.

Tracking a cohort makes it possible to compare progress and outcomes of different groups of students (e.g., groups defined by race, age or other demographic characteristics) and to determine if there are gaps in achievement among groups of interest.

**Figure 2.** Persistence, completion and transfer rates of Achieving the Dream students by enrollment timing

Enrollment timing	Enrolled second term	Second year		Third year	
		Still enrolled	Completed or transferred	Enrolled, any time	Completed or transferred
<b>Average</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>18</b>
Enrolled immediately	79	57	11	34	18
Delayed enrollment					
1–2 years	66	42	14	25	19
3–4 years	62	39	14	22	19
5 years or more	63	40	12	22	17

Note: The following student cohorts were included in this analysis: Round 1, 2002, 2003; Round 2, 2003, 2004; Round 3, 2004, 2005; Round 4, 2005, 2006; Round 5, 2006, 2007; Round 6, 2007. Only students with valid high school graduation data were included; 76 percent of student records carry valid high school graduation year data and were included in this analysis.

yet completion and transfer rates were similar, and, contrary to previous research, sometimes slightly higher, for students who delayed their enrollment. Seventy-nine percent of students enrolling in the fall term immediately after completing high school persisted to the spring, compared with 62 to 66 percent of those who delayed their enrollment (Figure 2). Second and third year persistence rates continue to be higher for students enrolling immediately compared with those who delay enrollment. The difference continues into the third year, where the 34 percent of students that enrolled immediately were still enrolled compared with 22 to 25 percent of those students who delayed their enrollment. The difference in the persistence rates between immediate and delayed rates over time declines.

Students in the two groups may have different education goals, have variations in previous college credits accumulated, may be referred to fewer developmental classes, or have different enrollment intensities. Interestingly, these differences coupled with the earlier advantage seen in persistence rates for the immediate college enrollees did not translate into higher graduation rates

immediately completed or transferred as did 17 to 19 percent of those who delayed.

Noteworthy, is that among students who delayed enrollment, those who delayed only one to two years persisted, completed, and transferred at rates slightly higher than those who delayed five or more years; thus, the longer the delay, the lower the chances for persistence, completion, or transfer.

## Who Delays Enrollment?

Students who delay their enrollment have different characteristics when compared with immediate enrollees. Not surprisingly, students enrolling immediately after high school were more likely to enroll full-time than those delaying their enrollment: 70 percent of students enrolling immediately enrolled full-time compared with 54, 42 and 29 percent of those delaying one to two, three to four, or five years or more (Figure 3).

Interestingly, students enrolling immediately were more likely to enroll in transfer-seeking programs as opposed to terminal-seeking, while the reverse was true for those delaying enrollment. Furthermore, the longer the student delayed enrollment, the more likely he or she was to enroll in a terminal-seeking program. Older students who delay their postsecondary enrollment after high school graduation may have clearer vocational goals and need to gain employment as quickly as possible compared to those coming directly out of high school.

The longer students delay enrollment the less likely they are to start college with developmental needs. Thirty percent of students enrolling immediately required no developmental education compared with 43 percent of students delaying enrollment 1 to 2 years and 48 and 52 percent for those delaying 3 to 4, and 5 or more years.

The breadth of developmental needs was another factor that differed among the groups. Immediate enrollees were more likely to have developmental needs in two or three areas than were those students who delayed their entry to college; those with longer delay were referred to fewer subject areas.

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compared with students who delayed enrollment; completion and transfer rates were similar for delayed compared with immediate enrollees. The percentage of students who completed or transferred by the end of the second academic year was 11 percent for immediate enrollees, only slightly lower than the 12 to 14 percent for delayed enrollees. Further analysis of the types of credentials students earned may reveal that students who delay enrollment with work experience enroll to gain work-related training and credentials in the form of short-term certificates rather than longer-term associate's degrees. By the end of the third year, the gap effectively disappeared; 18 percent of students enrolling

**Figure 3.** Percentage distribution of Achieving the Dream students by enrollment timing and selected characteristics

Student characteristic	Enrolled immediately	Delayed enrollment		
		1–2 years	3–4 years	5 years or more
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<i>Attendance status, first term</i>				
Full-time	70	54	42	29
Part-time	30	46	58	71
<i>Major program area</i>				
Terminal-seeking	31	35	38	46
Transfer-seeking	61	56	53	43
Undeclared	8	9	10	11
<i>Number of developmental subjects referred</i>				
None	30	43	48	52
One	29	26	25	25
Two	21	16	15	13
Three	20	15	12	10
<i>Developmental referrals</i>				
Math				
Not referred	39	50	53	56
One level below	24	18	17	15
Two or more levels below	37	32	30	29
English				
Not referred	65	73	76	80
One level below	22	17	15	13
Two or more levels below	12	10	8	8
Reading				
Not referred	66	75	80	83
One level below	23	17	14	11
Two or more levels below	11	8	7	6
<i>Pell grant status</i>				
Did not receive Pell grant	61	63	61	59
Received Pell grant	39	37	39	42
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Native American	1	1	1	2
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	5	6	5
Black, non-Hispanic	17	18	19	22
White, non-Hispanic	52	52	50	51
Hispanic	20	18	17	13
Non-resident alien	5	6	7	7
<i>Gender</i>				
Female	52	53	57	64
Male	48	47	43	36

Note: The following student cohorts were included in this analysis: Round 1, 2002, 2003; Round 2, 2003, 2004; Round 3, 2004, 2005; Round 4, 2005, 2006; Round 5, 2006, 2007; Round 6, 2007. Only students with valid high school graduation data were included; 76 percent of student records carry valid high school graduation year data and were included in this analysis.

The majority, 61 percent of students enrolling immediately, were referred to developmental math—one or more levels. Students who delayed their enrollment were much less likely to be referred to developmental math, 50 to 56 percent of students who delayed enrollment were placed at college level. Fewer students require developmental English and reading than math; however, the trend is the same with students enrolling immediately being referred at higher rates than those who delay their enrollment, and the longer the enrollment is delayed, the less need there is for developmental education. One explanation for this might be the difference in choice of a transfer-seeking versus a terminal-seeking program. In some colleges, students in terminal-

seeking programs, chosen more by delayed entry students, do not have to meet the same entry requirements as those in transfer programs. An alternative possibility may be that students defined as delaying their enrollment at the Achieving the Dream institution had transferred from another postsecondary institution where they completed their developmental education, or already had a degree. Finally, older students may have work experience that decreased their need for developmental education.

Overall, about one in four students studied received Pell grants. Students delaying the enrollment 5 years or more were slightly more likely to

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receive Pell grants, 42 percent, than those enrolling immediately, 39 percent. This is likely due to the fact that students delaying enrollment are independent students no longer associated with their parents' incomes and may have families of their own to support. Interestingly, 37 percent of those who delayed their enrollment 1 to 2 years received Pell grants, which is a slight decline from those who enrolled immediately or waited longer to enroll.

**Figure 4.** Percentage of Achieving the Dream still enrolled, completed or transferred by the end of the third year by enrollment timing status

Student characteristic	Enrolled immediately	Delayed enrollment
<b>Total</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>42</b>
<i>Attendance status, first term</i>		
Full-time	56	48
Part-time	45	37
<i>Major</i>		
Terminal-seeking	50	42
Transfer-seeking	55	43
Undeclared	47	34
<i>Number of developmental subjects referred</i>		
None	57	42
One	56	44
Two	50	37
Three	45	35
<i>Developmental referrals</i>		
<i>Math</i>		
Not referred	57	42
One level below	54	44
Two or more levels below	48	37
<i>English</i>		
Not referred	55	43
One level below	49	37
Two or more levels below	45	35
<i>Reading</i>		
Not referred	56	43
One level below	50	38
Two or more levels below	44	34
<i>Pell grant status</i>		
Did not receive Pell grant	53	40
Received Pell grant	49	43
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>		
Native American	43	33
Asian/Pacific Islander	67	48
Black, non-Hispanic	43	36
White, non-Hispanic	55	43
Hispanic	53	41
Non-resident alien	54	44
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	55	43
Male	51	39

Note: The following student cohorts were included in this analysis: Round 1, 2002, 2003; Round 2, 2003, 2004; Round 3, 2004, 2005; Round 4, 2005, 2006; Round 5, 2006, 2007; Round 6, 2007. Only students with valid high school graduation data were included; 76 percent of student records carry valid high school graduation year data and were included in this analysis.

By race/ethnicity, Hispanic students comprised a larger proportion of students enrolling immediately compared with those who delay their enrollment. Conversely, the proportion of students delaying enrollment that are Black, non-Hispanic increases with length of delay. The proportion of students that are white, non-Hispanic varies only slightly from 50 to 52 percent.

Females were more likely to delay enrollment compared with males: 52 percent of immediate enrollees were female, but 64 percent of students entering college after five years were females. Compared with men, women may face more family obligations that cause them to delay college enrollment.

## Enrollment Timing, Outcomes and Characteristics

The data show that students enrolling immediately after high school were more likely to persist, complete, or transfer by the end of the third academic year when compared with students delaying enrollment, 53 compared with 42 percent (Figure 4). Including student characteristics shows several interesting differences:

- Students who enrolled immediately after high school and who attended college full-time were more likely to persist, complete or persist within three years than were their part-time counterparts, 56 compared with 45 percent. Students who delayed enrollment, but attended full-time, were more likely to achieve better three-year outcomes than those enrolling immediately, but on a part-time basis, 48 compared with 45 percent.

“...students enrolling immediately after high school graduation and referred to three developmental education subjects were more likely to be successful at the end of three years than were delayed enrollment students with no developmental needs...”

- Students coming straight out of high school and enrolling in transfer-seeking programs, exceeded three-year outcome success measures by 5 percentage points compared with those in terminal-seeking programs; however students who delayed enrollment were just about as likely to succeed in both transfer- and terminal-seeking programs.
- Enrolling immediately after high school increased students' chances of succeeding within three years, regardless of the number of developmental subjects the student took. Noteworthy is the fact that students enrolling immediately after high school graduation and referred to three developmental

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education subjects were more likely to be successful at the end of three years than were delayed enrollment students with no developmental needs.

- Immediate enrollees who did not receive Pell grants were more likely to be successful at the end of three years than were those who received Pell grants. The relationship was reverse for delayed enrollment students; those with Pell grants were more likely to be successful than were those without Pell grants.

## What Does It Mean?

Nearly one-half of students enrolled in Achieving the Dream Colleges directly after high school. The other half delayed their enrollment for some period of time—about one-fifth for one to two years, and one-quarter for five years or more. The findings somewhat support previous findings that delaying enrollment reduces the chances of student success: persistence rates were higher for students enrolling immediately after high school than for those who delayed; however, that did not translate into higher completion and transfer rates for the early enrollees.

The longer students delayed their enrollment, the more likely they were to enroll part-time. Delayed enrollment students were more likely to be in terminal-seeking majors and require less developmental education, both in depth and breadth than immediate enrollees. Furthermore, delayed enrollees were more likely to be Pell grant recipients than were those enrolling immediately after high school. A slightly larger proportion of delayed enrollees were Black, non-Hispanic when compared with those who enroll immediately, while a smaller proportion was Hispanic. Females comprised a larger share of delayed enrollees.

The findings also indicate that students delaying their enrollment and attending part-time

have the lowest combined three-year persistence, completion, and transfer rate. Delayed enrollment students were different from those coming directly out of high school and have different goals and needs compared with their younger peers. Given that this group of older enrollees represents half of the incoming students, improving their success rates will go a long way toward improving completion and transfer rates. Compared with students enrolling directly from high school, older students have different educational goals and different enrollment patterns, but once the early drop-outs have left the college, seem to be tenacious in their commitment to reaching their goals. Colleges should spend some time identifying the goals and needs of these delayed enrollment students to ensure proper and necessary support is provided to help them succeed.

Given the knowledge that delaying enrollment in college is oftentimes negatively related with outcomes, the following questions might help colleges further explore this issue:

- We know the effects developmental needs have on student outcomes. How does the success rate of delayed enrollment students in developmental education compare with those students just out of high school?
- What percent of the delayed enrollment students do not plan to work toward credentials at the time they enroll?
- What are the differences in the distribution of program major choices for immediately and delayed enrollment students?
- How do our overall persistence and completion rates compare between recent high school graduates and delayed enrollees?

Achieving the Dream colleges can download the companion tables to this issue of *Data Notes*, featuring your college's data, at the Achieving the Dream National Database website, [www.Dreamwebsubmission.org](http://www.Dreamwebsubmission.org). ■

*Data Notes* is a bimonthly publication that examines data to illuminate the challenges facing Achieving the Dream colleges and to chart their progress over time.

This issue of *Data Notes* was written by Sue Clery, Senior Research Associate, JBL Associates, Inc., and edited by Katie Loovis, Achieving the Dream's Chief Operating Officer. Newsletter production by Linda Marcetti, founder of Asterisk & Image, subcontractor to JBL Associates, Inc.

If you have questions regarding this issue, or if there is a topic you would like to see addressed in *Data Notes*, please contact Sue Clery at [sclery@jblassoc.com](mailto:sclery@jblassoc.com).

**Note:** This issue of *Data Notes* uses the April 2011 version of the Achieving the Dream National Database. Institutions are grouped by the year they started work with the Achieving the Dream.